

Message Text

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USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 3511

EXDIS TREAT AS NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR MARR PINT LE
SUBJ: SOUTH LEBANON: SARKIS CALLS FOR HELP

1. SUMMARY. PRESIDENT SARKIS GIVES GLOOMY ACCOUNT OF HIS STEWARDSHIP OF LEBANON. REAFFIRMS LEBANESE READINESS TO SEND TROOPS TO SOUTH, AND SAYS SYRIANS HAVE GIVEN COMMITMENT TO ASSURE THEIR LINE OF COMMUNICATION. DOES NOT BELIEVE ISRAELIS CANNOT CONTROL MILITIAS AND ASKS IF WE CANNOT HELP HIM SOLVE THIS ONE PROBLEM. IF WE CANNOT, HE SEES LITTLE HOPE FOR LEBANON. END SUMMARY.

2. CALLED ON PRESIDENT SARKIS MORNING JUNE 24. TO MY OPENING QUESTION ABOUT HOW THINGS WERE, HE SAID I COULD SEE FOR MYSELF; THEY WERE VERY DIFFICULT.

3. I SAID I HAD HAD LONG DISCUSSION OF LEBANON WITH SECRETARY DURING MY RECENT CONSULTATION AND THAT LATTER WAS FOLLOWING DEVELOPMENTS HERE CLOSELY AND WITH CONCERN. WE WERE ANXIOUS
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TO DO WHAT WE COULD TO HELP, BUT WE HAD NO SOLUTION IN HAND. NEVERTHELESS, I DETECTED A CERTAIN IMPROVEMENT IN THE SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON, IN SPITE OF CURRENT DIFFICULTIES. IF IT WAS TRUE THAT THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA NOW REPRESENTED THE ONLY OBSTACLE TO THE REASSERTION OF LEBANESE AUTHORITY IN THE SOUTH, THAT IS, IF SYRIAN AND PALESTINIAN ATTITUDES HAD CHANGED AS REPORTED, AND IF THE MILITIA

WERE REALLY UNDER ISRAELI CONTROL, AS THE LEBANESE BELIEVED, THEN IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE TO FIND AN ARRANGEMENT EVERYONE COULD ACCEPT. WE WERE MAKING SINCERE AND CONTINUED EFFORTS TO THAT END.

4. SARKIS THEN LAUNCHED INTO LONG AND BITTER REVIEW OF EVENTS OF LAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS. HE HAD GONE TO RIYADH IN 1976 WITH A PLAN WHICH WAS APPROVED BY ARAB LEADERS AND WHICH CALLED FOR STRICT IMPLEMENTATION OF CAIRO ACCORDS, AND FOR DISARMAMENT OF PALESTINIANS AND LEBANESE BY ARAB DETERRENT FORCE. HE HAD PLEADED WITH EGYPTIANS AND OTHER ARABS TO CONTRIBUTE FORCES, AND SYRIANS HAD MADE CLEAR THEIR LACK OF INTEREST IN SUPPLYING ALL THE TROOPS, BUT IN FINAL ANALYSIS MOST OF BURDEN HAD BEEN LEFT UP TO THEM. OPERATION HAD STARTED WELL, BUT HAD QUICKLY FOUNDERED ON ROCKS OF EGYPTIAN-SYRIAN RIVALRY AND UNWILLINGNESS OF ARAB STATES TO CONFRONT PLO. THEN HAD COME MURDER OF JUMBLATT, WHICH HAD RESULTED IN EVEN GREATER PALESTINIAN INTRANSIGENCE. PALESTINIAN MODERATES HAD NEVERTHELESS COME FORWARD WITH SHTAURA AGREEMENT, BUT THAT HAD BECOME DEAD LETTER FOLLOWING ISRAELI INVASION OF LAST FALL AND SADAT'S VISIT TO JERUSALEM. PATIENTLY, HE HAD CONTINUED TO WORK FOR PROGRESS ON INDIVIDUAL ISSUES, HOPING THAT WITH TIME AND A LITTLE PEACE, HE COULD GRADUALLY REASSERT AUTHORITY OF THE STATE AND THE ARMY. TODAY THE STATE AND THE ARMY WERE BUT THE APPEARANCE
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OF SUCH. THERE WERE ONLY TEN OR TWENTY RESPONSIBLE LEBANESE WHO FELT AS HE DID THAT THE GOVERNMENT MUST BE THE CEMENT BETWEEN THE VARIOUS FACTIONS, AND THEY WERE NOW SWIMMING AGAINST THE CURRENT. THE CHRISTIAN ACTIVISTS WERE ALL WORKING FOR PARTITION AND THE RANK AND FILE WERE AFRAID TO SPEAK OUT. THE MOSLEMS OPPOSED PARTITION, BUT WERE JUST AS UNCOOPERATIVE AS THE CHRISTIANS.

5. THE FAYYADIYAH INCIDENT HAD COME, AND THEY HAD MANAGED TO SURMOUNT IT, MORE OR LESS. THEN THERE HAD BEEN THE SECOND ISRAELI INVASION, AND THEY HAD COPEDED SOMEHOW WITH THE RESULTING PROBLEMS, INCLUDING THE INFLUX OF A MASS OF REFUGEES FROM THE SOUTH. THEY HAD SURVIVED. THEY HAD SURVIVED THE TWO AIN AR-RUMMANEH BATTLES. THEY WOULD PROBABLY SURVIVE THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE FRANGIEH MASSACRE, BUT THE HARD FACT WAS THAT LEBANON'S BASIC PROBLEMS WERE INSOLUBLE. HE HAD BEEN ON THE CROSS FOR TWO YEARS. WE COULD NOT EXPECT HIM TO WORK MIRACLES. THERE WERE 500,000 INDIVIDUAL WEAPONS AND 150,000 ARMED MEN IN LEBANON TODAY, AND THE LEBANESE SECURITY FORCES COULD NOT POSSIBLY DEAL WITH THEM. HE COULD NOT EXPECT THE SYRIANS TO DISARM THE PALESTINIANS WITHOUT DISARMING THE CHRISTIANS

AS WELL, AND HE COULD NOT EXPECT THE CHRISTIANS TO DISARM IF THE PALESTINIANS DID NOT. THE LATTER WERE NOT GOING TO SURRENDER THEIR LAST BASTION BECAUSE TO DO SO WAS TO COMMIT SUICIDE, AND THEY WERE IN NO MOOD TO DO THAT.

6. SO WHERE WERE WE? THE MOST WE COULD HOPE FOR WAS PROGRESS ON SPECIFIC ISSUES, AND HOPE THAT SOLUTION OF ONE MIGHT LEAD TO PROGRESS ON ANOTHER. I HAD SAID THE SECRETARY WAS FOLLOWING EVENTS HERE WITH CONCERN. EVERYBODY WAS, BUT NO ONE SEEMED ABLE TO DO ANYTHING. COULD WE NOT HELP HIM SOLVE AT LEAST ONE PROBLEM? COULD WE NOT GET THE ISRAELIS TO BRING THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS TO HEEL SO THAT THE LEBANESE ARMY COULD MOVE SOUTH? PROGRESS ON THAT ISSUE WOULD FACILITATE PROGRESS ON OTHERS. HE DID NOT BELIEVE FOR A MOMENT THAT
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THE ISRAELIS COULD NOT CONTROL THE MILITIAS AND IF WE COULD NOT OR WOULD NOT PREVAIL ON THEM TO DO SO, HE SAW LITTLE HOPE FOR LEBANON.

7. I REITERATED THAT WE HAD MADE VERY STRONG DEMARCHES ON THE SUBJECT TO THE ISRAELIS AND SAID WE WOULD CONTINUE TO DO WHAT WE COULD. PART OF PROBLEM, HOWEVER, WAS ISRAELI SKEPTICISM THAT LEBANESE COULD AND WOULD SEND TROOPS TO SOUTH, PARTICULARLY IN WAKE FRANGIEH MURDERS. THEY WERE ALSO SKEPTICAL ABOUT ROLE LEBANESE TROOPS WOULD PLAY THERE AND CONCERNED ABOUT FATE OF HADDAD, CHIDIAC AND OTHERS WHO HAD LED CHRISTIAN FORCES.

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 3511

EXDIS TREAT AS NODIS

8. SARKIS SAID ROLE OF LEBANESE ARMY WOULD BE TO PREVENT PALESTINIAN INFILTRATION ACROSS SECURITY ZONE INTO ISRAEL. IN ORDER TO PLAY THIS ROLE THEY WOULD ALSO HAVE TO TAKE OVER CONTROL OF BORDER ZONE FROM CHRISTIAN MILITIAS. THIS DID NOT MEAN ARMY WAS GOING IN WITH INTENTION FIGHTING MILITIAS, BUT IT COULD NOT PERMIT EITHER THEM OR PALESTINIANS TO RUN INDEPENDENT MILITARY OPERATION IN THAT AREA. OTHERWISE THERE WAS NO PURPOSE TO BE SERVED BY ARMY'S GOING IN.

9. AS FOR AFTERMATH OF FRANGIEH MURDERS, WHILE IT MIGHT MEAN THAT THEY WOULD HAVE TO DETACH UNIT OR TWO, IT WOULD NOT AFFECT GOL'S WILLINGNESS TO SEND TROOPS SOUTH. DECISION TO DO SO HAD BEEN TAKEN AT LATAKIA, AND SYRIANS HAD UNDERTAKEN TO INSURE SAFETY OF ACCESS ROUTE FOR SOUTHERN FORCE. TROOPS COULD NOT GO IN ONLY TO HAVE PITCHED BATTLE WITH CHRISTIANS, HOWEVER. THAT WOULD HAVE DISASTROUS EFFECT ON REST OF COUNTRY.

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10. I SAID ISRAELIS CLAIMED MILITIAS WERE OUT OF CONTROL AND GENERAL BEN GAL HAD REPORTEDLY SUGGESTED THAT SOLUTION WAS FOR BEIRUT TO RECOGNIZE HADDAD AS COMMANDER OF THE SOUTH. SARKIS SAID THIS WAS OBVIOUSLY UNREALISTIC. FOR ISRAELIS TO MAKE SUCH A PROPOSAL RAISED QUESTION WHETHER THEIR INTENT WAS NOT TO PARTITION COUNTRY, BECAUSE THAT WOULD CERTAINLY BE THE RESULT OF ANY SUCH ACTION BY BEIRUT.

11. I ASKED WHAT GOL PROPOSED TO DO ABOUT HADDAD. SARKIS SAID THAT WAS POLITICAL RATHER THAN MILITARY PROBLEM. HE WOULD CERTAINLY HAVE TO BROUGHT BACK TO BEIRUT, BUT HE WAS ALSO CERTAINLY NOT GOING TO BE SHOT. SOME COMPROMISE WOULD HAVE TO BE WORKED OUT.

12. I THEN ASKED WHAT POSITIVE ASSURANCES HE COULD GIVE ME REGARDING READINESS OF LEBANESE ARMY TO MOVE. IF ISRAELIS WERE ABLE TO BRING MILITIAS UNDER CONTROL, HOW LONG WOULD IT TAKE THE ARMY TO GO SOUTH? WOULD IT BE MATTER OF DAYS OR WEEKS? SARKIS SAID HE WOULD HAVE TO CONSULT WITH ARMY ABOUT THIS, BUT ASSUMED, PROVIDED THERE WERE NO PROBLEMS WITH "LITTLE GROUPS" (GROUPUSCULES), WHICH HE

DID NOT DEFINE, ARMY COULD MOVE VERY QUICKLY. HE WOULD BE BACK TO ME WITH FIRMER ANSWER WITHIN 48 TO 72 HOURS.

13. WE THEN HAD ANOTHER GLOOMY GO AROUND ON THE SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY. HE WAS CHEERED WHEN I TOLD HIM PAN AMERICAN HAD APPARENTLY DECIDED DEFINITELY TO CLOSE ITS DAMASCUS OPERATION AND ESTABLISH FEEDER ROUTE TO BEIRUT, AND HE WAS AMUSED TO HEAR THAT MUFTI HASSAN KHALID HAD BEEN SHOCKED BY DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN WOMANHOOD DURING A RECENT VISIT TO U.S., BUT OTHERWISE WE HAD UNRELIEVED GLOOM.

14. COMMENT: LEBANON IS A CASE STUDY IN ANARCHY. THE
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LIMITS TO WHICH THAT ANARCHY CAN BE PUSHED BEFORE TOTAL COLLAPSE OF THE STATE OCCURS ARE OBVIOUSLY CONSIDERABLY MORE FLEXIBLE THAN MANY OF US HAD THOUGHT. ANY NORMAL THIRD WORLD STATE WOULD HAVE HAD A REVOLUTION, COUP D'ETAT OR COMPLETE COLLAPSE WELL BEFORE THIS. OF COURSE, THERE ARE MANY HERE WHO WOULD ARGUE THAT, INDEED, THE STATE HAS COLLAPSED AND IT IS ONLY A POLITE FICTION TO MAINTAIN IT STILL EXISTS, A FICTION INDULGED IN BY EVERYONE BECAUSE THEY CANNOT FACE THE STARK, ANARCHICAL ALTERNATIVE.

15. NEVERTHELESS, I THINK WE MUST CONTINUE TRYING TO HELP THE PATIENT. THERE IS STILL LIFE IN THE BODY, AND IT DOES NOT REQUIRE REANIMATION. RATHER, IT NEEDS CONFIDENCE IN ITS ABILITY TO DEAL WITH ITS PROBLEMS, AND IT NEEDS PROTECTION FROM UNHELPFUL INTERFERENCE. AS SARKIS SAYS, THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE IS INSOLUBLE, FOR THE MOMENT AT LEAST, BUT PERHAPS PROGRESS ON SOME OTHER ISSUES WILL AT LEAST PERMIT ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH PROGRESS CAN BE MADE ON SOME BASIC PROBLEMS. IN SARKIS'S WORDS, HIS ONLY POSSIBILITY IS A POLICY OF LITTLE STEPS.

16. ONE OF THOSE STEPS, RESTORATION OF AUTHORITY IN THE SOUTH, IS NOT SO LITTLE, BUT AT THE MOMENT IT IS THE ONLY SECTOR IN WHICH THERE IS A POSSIBLE OPENING. IF WE CANNOT PREVAIL ON THE ISRAELIS TO FACILITATE THE SENDING OF LEBANESE FORCES INTO THE SOUTH, SOMETHING WE HAVE BEEN URGING ON THE LEBANESE FOR OVER NINE MONTHS, I DO NOT CLAIM IT WILL INEVITABLY MEAN THE END OF LEBANON, BUT SARKIS WILL CERTAINLY SEE IT AS SHUTTING OFF THE ONLY CURRENT LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL, AND SOONER OR LATER HE AND THE REST OF THE REGIME ARE GOING TO DESPAIR AND GIVE UP IF THERE IS NOT SOME PALPABLE PROGRESS ON AT LEAST SOME OF THE PROBLEMS.

17. KNOWING THE UNRULY TEMPER OF THE LEBANESE, I WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED TO LEARN THAT THE ISRAELIS DO NOT IN FACT

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HAVE THE MILITIAS FULLY UNDER CONTROL, BUT I SUSPECT THEIR
CONTROL IS SUFFICIENT TO PERMIT THE UNIMPEDED ENTRY OF
THE LEBANESE ARMY INTO THE SOUTH. I THINK IT IS IN THE
NATIONAL INTEREST TO PERSUADE THEM TO EXERCISE THAT CONTROL.
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